

Learning Support Teams (LST)

Early Intervention to identify needs and provide inclusive support for all learners and teams.



Project "Learning Support Teams"

The project "Learning Support Teams (LST)" aims to provide schools which need support in dealing with the challenges of high heterogeneity among their students with fast and uncomplicated on-site assistance. To achieve this, Zurich University of Teacher Education (PHZH) and Zurich University of Special Needs Education (HfH), in collaboration with the project partners (Canton of Aargau, School Schachen, School District Authority Zürichberg City of Zurich, School Authority of Liechtenstein, City of Winterthur), develop support services for schools, which fulfil the following criteria:

The support services...

- are directly and immediately practice-oriented (e.g., by collaboratively preparing, conducting and evaluating teaching)
- help teachers, school teams and principals bundle and use their own resources to enable them to handle challenging situations without being overwhelmed
- entail to teach every student at their own school and in their own class, thereby avoiding segregated solutions
- use the expertise of the participating universities in the preparation and support of the LST
- are characterized by careful accompanying research

The aim to provide low-threshold and rapid support for schools can be an important step toward creating an inclusive school community. Schools should be able to access the support from a member of a LST easily and free of charge, whenever they are in a crisis or the current situation requires immediate action. This will be authorized by the responsible authority. A team may be requested for a few days up to several weeks. Important is that the involved school stakeholders make use of the LST on a voluntary basis.

The focus of the support provided by the LST is teachers' capacity to act effectively in dealing with the heterogeneity of students directly within the classroom. The assistance is provided by a member of the LST team directly on site, for example through the joint planning, implementation, and evaluation of teaching. The explicit aim is to collaboratively develop strategies that help bundle and utilize existing resources in such a way that challenging situations can be addressed without overload, and that every student can remain at their own school and in their familiar class environment.

The LST concept is based on an approach that has been tried and tested in Canada for many years (Katz & Brownlie 2012; Katz 2013a, 2013b; Katz, Lamoureux & Moran 2018). Building on the ideas of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (see Story, Mueller & Mace 1998), Katz and colleagues developed the Three-Block Model (Katz 2013b), which focuses on three key areas: first, the promotion of social and emotional learning, aiming to create supportive and empathetic learning communities; second, establishing inclusive teaching practices that incorporate differentiated and exploratory learning approaches; and third, creating systems and structures that support inclusive strategies and cooperative practices in schools (Katz 2013b). The ideas of the Three-Block Model form the foundation of the work of the LST, guiding schools in planning and experimenting with the next steps. The LST offers a range of support options at the level of teaching development (teacher/team), at the level of school leadership and in school development. To determine the specific support needs within schools, it is important to first clarify these needs in detail.

A LST generally consists of two to three specifically qualified people. The members of an LST possess a variety of formal qualifications: teaching diplomas at different levels (including several years of professional experience), school leadership diplomas, special needs education, and possibly additional qualifications in areas such as school and teaching development, supervision, or counselling. A requirement is that the members of an LST are willing to actively participate in (peer)supervision sessions and to make their experiences and expertise available for the accompanying research.

Networking and mutual support

Inclusive work thrives on exchange and collaboration. The project includes regular, needs-based exchange meetings: the Learning Support Teams and the district leaders meet in separate formats, each informed by the findings of the research groups. The goal is to share experiences, continuously improve the work, and relieve schools and organizations.

Accompanying research

The LST project (2025–2028) is accompanied by scientific research through the interdisciplinary collaboration of the two universities Zurich University of Teacher Education (PHZH) and Zurich University of Special Needs Education (HfH). Data on the effectiveness of LST are collected to continuously adapt the support services to practical needs and to provide evidence-based feedback to decision-makers. In addition, the implementation of the project in practice is examined. This allows for ongoing quality monitoring and for the concept to be adapted if necessary.

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